

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Introduction

This plan has been prepared in accordance with the *Interagency Policy Guidance and Direction: Wildland Fire Rehabilitation and Restoration and Attachments- Final Policy Decisions (1998)* signed by the Assistant Secretary of the Interior, Policy, Management and Budget and Under Secretary of Agriculture, NRE as well as *BLM Emergency Fire Rehabilitation Handbook H-1742-1 (1999)*. Emergency fire rehabilitation recommendations are provided for all lands burned within the following complex of fires, Adobe, Camp Creek, Charlie, Choke Cherry, Cold Springs, Gamble, Mahogany, Mule, PattyJack, Rabbit, Sheep Pen, South Cricket, Stag, Sun Creek, Three Mile, Vega, West Basin, Wildcat, Wimpy, 18 Mile and 21 Mile, including: public lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), State, and private lands. The primary objectives of the Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation (BAER) Plan are:

- To prescribe post-fire mitigation measures necessary to protect human life, property, and critical cultural and natural resources.
- To promptly mitigate the unacceptable effects of fire and its suppression on lands within and adjacent to the burned area in accordance with management policies, and all relevant federal, state, and local laws and regulations.

The BAER Plan addresses emergency rehabilitation of fire suppression impacts and fire effects. The BAER Team conducted an analysis of fire effects throughout the lands impacted by the fire. Specialists assessed the overall watershed changes from the fire and developed a burn severity map. Archeologists examined suppression impacts for potential damage to cultural sites and initiated a cultural resource damage assessment. The vegetation specialist evaluated and assessed fire effects and suppression impacts to vegetative resources, including threatened and endangered (T&E) species, and identified values at risk associated with vegetative losses. The wildlife biologist conducted an assessment of T&E species and initiated and closed Section 7 consultation with US Fish & Wildlife Service. The GIS specialists gathered the data layers necessary for the plan, coordinated GPS activities, and transmitted the data to BLM. The operations specialists inventoried fire suppression impacts, and developed specifications for rehabilitation.

Resource assessments produced by these specialists are in Appendix I and the treatments identified in the assessments under management/monitoring recommendations can be found in Part F. A summary of the costs by jurisdiction is in Part E. Appendix II contains the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance documentation summary. Appendix III contains the BAER Plan maps. Appendix IV contains photo documentation and Appendix V, the supporting documentation.

### Incident Overview:

The complex of wildfires began on June 25, 2000, when lightning ignited the South Cricket fire in the Elko BLM Field Office area. Over the next few weeks lightning ignited 20 new fires, including the, South Cricket fire listed above at 66,487 acres, the West Basin fire at 55,197 acres, the Camp Creeks fires at 31,194 acres, and the Choke Cherry fire at 31,051, where some of the larger fires. This plan will address a total 21 fires all within Elko County, Nevada. The West Basin fire burned onto the Sawtooth National Forest located in Idaho. This portion of the fire will be addressed in a BAER plan that will be prepared by Forest Service in Twin Falls, Idaho. Factors contributing to the rapid growth of the many fires included strong and erratic winds, low humidity, extremely dry fuels, limited access and limited resource personnel to control the fires. The complex of fires encompassed approximately 220,497 acres of federal, state and private lands within four counties within the BLM Elko Field Office area.

## Local Environment

The environmental setting for the fire is a mixed area of high desert canyons and ridges occurring roughly between 4,600 feet to 8,500 feet above mean sea level. This topographic variation produces a mixed patchwork of vegetation types and fuel situations. Vegetation in the area is dominated by grass species, junipers interspersed with bitterbrush, mountain mahogany, low and big sagebrush. These vegetation types are important for winter and summer thermal cover for big game and habitat for facultative and juniper obligate species. Habitat burned was part of the elk and deer crucial habitat as well as sage grouse habitat.

Resource concerns expressed by the BLM, county, state, project cooperators and the public concerning vegetative resources include: loss of vegetative cover, soil erosion, damaging peak water flows, short/long-term impacts to wildlife/fish habitat, watershed stability, site productivity, vegetative diversity, weeds, aesthetics, restrictions on vehicular access and related damages.

## Analysis

In late August of, 2000 the Elko BAER team, composed largely of local BLM resource specialists with assistance from the Wyoming, Kemmerer Field Office (BLM), and Caliente Field Office (BLM). (see Part D). The team was an interdisciplinary group including experts in range ecology, wildlife biology, fish ecology, weeds, riparian, hydrology, archaeology, recreation, soils, and fire/fuels management, engineers. Aerial and ground reconnaissance of the burned areas was conducted, by the BAER team. The team mapped burn intensity and documented impacts to resource values. The interdisciplinary nature of the team assisted in making rapid assessments of overall impacts and allowed for a more comprehensive treatment program than might have been possible had these individuals worked on their own.

The Elko Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation (BAER) Team also hosted two open house public meeting, one in Jackpot, Nevada and one in Elko, Nevada. The meetings allowed the public to review maps and provide recommendations for the 21 fires which occurred in the late summer of 2000.

The scope of the fire makes it imperative that swift and effective measures be taken to rehabilitate the damaged landscape. It is clear that potential long-term effects to a variety of resources have been initiated. Should heavy precipitation occur within the next few weeks there could be substantial erosion and loss of soil. Erosion could slow the rehabilitation process and delay the return to pre-fire conditions. The measures presented below are intended to reduce the potential for severe impacts and, in some instances, result in beneficial impacts. Towards this end we have drawn heavily upon existing environmental documents and management plans for guidance regarding overall goals.

Implementation of the proposed actions described in the Elko 21 Fire Complex plan will protect soils in the burned area, including preventing potential loss of soil due to wind and water erosion; will reduce the potential for invasion and establishment of noxious weeds and cheatgrass; will provide quality forage for livestock, wildlife, and wildhorses; and will facilitate meeting established standards and guidelines for livestock grazing.

The Elko Field Area Resources Management Plan list the following objectives:

- Wilderness: manage as wilderness those portions of the WSA's that are manageable as wilderness and wilderness values are capable of balancing other resource values not limited to, improving channel stability, vegetation diversity and abundance, and water quality.
- Livestock: Maintain or improve the condition of the public rangelands to enhance productivity for all rangeland values.

- Wildlife Habitat: Conserve and enhance terrestrial, riparian and aquatic wildlife habitat.
- Wild Horses: Manage wild horse populations in their current herd areas consistent with other resources.
- Woodland products: Manage woodland areas to provide as wide a variety of products and services as possible to both the general public and commercial users.

### **Recommendations:**

It is imperative that the following recommendations be implemented as soon as possible. The sooner measures are in place to reduce the risk of catastrophic erosion the better chance the area has for a complete and swift recovery from the fire.

The BAER Team recommendations are:

#### **Fire Suppression Treatments:**

- R-2 Natural Resource Restoration
- W-1 Grass Reseeding

#### **Emergency Fire Rehabilitation Treatments**

- C-1a Archeological Resource Damage Assessment
- C-1b Archeological Resource Damage Assessment
- C-2a Historic Structure Damage Assessment
- C-2b Historic Structure Damage Assessment
- M-1 Monitoring
- M-2a Monitoring and Evaluation of Emergency Treatments
- M-2b Monitoring and Evaluation of Emergency Treatments
- M-2c Monitoring and Evaluation of Emergency Treatments
- M-2d Monitoring and Evaluation of Emergency Treatments
- N-1a Protection of Threatened and Endangered Species
- N-1b Protection of Threatened and Endangered Species
- N-2 Non-native Invasive Plant Control
- N3a Ecological Stabilization-Planting Seeding
- N3b Ecological Stabilization-Planting Seeding
- P-2a Grazing Exclusion
- P-2b Grazing Exclusion
- P-2c Grazing Exclusion
- P-3 Law Enforcement Protection
- R-2 Natural Resource Restoration
- S-2 Roads, Trails, and Safety Signs
- S-6 Facility Replacement
- W-1a Grass Reseeding
- W-1b Grass Reseeding
- W-3 Erosion Cloth/Soil Netting
- W-4 Straw Wattles
- W-12 Straw Bale Check Dams

Specifications were developed for all actions meeting the requirements of fire suppression or Emergency Fire Rehabilitation (EFR) funding.

This BAER Plan is the initial funding request for Emergency Fire Rehabilitation funds. This plan may also be used as a justification to seek funding from other sources. Additional supplemental requests may be made after this document has been reviewed and approved by Regional/National BAER Coordinators

specific to the complex of fires. The Emergency Fire Rehabilitation funding for this plan extends over three years from the date of plan approval. At the conclusion of the funding period, a final Accomplishment Report will be due to the approval authority. The Accomplishment Report will document the funding received, (initial and supplemental funding), treatments installed, the effectiveness of the installed treatments and the results of monitoring activities.